

# News Release



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## **Agencies Announce Decision on Double-crested Cormorant Management in Michigan**

Federal agencies have released the final Decision and Findings of No Significant Impact (FONSIs) for an Environmental Assessment (EA) on Double-crested cormorant damage management in Michigan. The EA replaces one completed in 2004 and supplemented in 2006.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's Wildlife Services prepared the EA in cooperation with the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Park Service. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Chippewa Ottawa Resource Authority, Little Traverse Bay Bands of Odawa Indians, Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, Bay Mills Indian Community, and Sault Ste. Marie Tribe of Chippewa Indians were consulted during preparation of the EA.

The agencies selected the proposed alternative, "Adaptive Integrated Cormorant Damage Management with Limited Annual Take", with modifications based on analysis of issues in public comments and population data on cormorants in Michigan. The management alternative uses an integrated wildlife damage management approach to reduce cormorant damage to property, aquaculture and natural resources, as well as cormorant-related risks to public safety. Physical exclusion, habitat modification or harassment would be used, when appropriate, to reduce damage. In other situations, birds may be humanely removed by shooting, egg oiling/destruction, nest destruction or euthanasia following live capture.

The selected alternative increases the maximum number of cormorants that may be lethally removed statewide from the current limit of 10,500 to 15,500 birds per year. It requires a minimum of 5,000 breeding pairs of cormorants be allowed to remain in the state. It also sets a minimum population for the Beaver Islands Archipelago of 3,000 pairs, an approximately 74% decrease from the 2007 peak of 11,549 pairs. The final alternative differs from the proposed alternative in the draft EA, which had a maximum annual take of 20,000 cormorants and an unspecified minimum population objective for the Beaver Islands Archipelago.

The EA provides details on specific sites where concerns exist regarding cormorant impacts on fish populations, including the Les Cheneaux Islands, Thunder Bay, Big and Little Bays de Noc,

the Beaver Island Archipelago, St Mary's River, Naubinway and Paquin Islands in Mackinac County, Tahquamenon Island in Chippewa County, and the Ludington Pumped Storage Project.

The preferred alternative allows for the continuation of the program in which volunteers working with Wildlife Services use harassment and limited shooting to decrease the number of cormorants in areas where fish populations appear to be particularly vulnerable. This approach has been used with apparent success at Drummond Island, Brevoort Lake, Big Manistique Lake, South Manistique Lake, Indian Lake, Long Lake and Grand Lake.

The EA also considers cormorant damage management on South Manitou Island, within the Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore, to protect the white cedar trees from damage by nesting cormorants. The National Park Service considers the ancient cedars in the Valley of the Giants on the island to be a distinctive and valuable plant community.

In 2003, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued regulations allowing more flexibility in the management of cormorants where they are causing damage to aquaculture stock and public resources such as fisheries, vegetation and other birds. Without this depredation order, agencies and individuals would not be able to use lethal methods to manage cormorant damage without a federal permit.

Cormorant damage management may not be conducted at a site without landowner permission and may not adversely affect other migratory birds or threatened or endangered species. It must satisfy annual reporting and evaluation requirements. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will ensure the long-term sustainability of cormorant populations through oversight of agency activities and regular population monitoring.

Copies of the EA and Decision/FONSI may be downloaded from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's web site at <http://www.fws.gov/midwest/midwestbird/cormorants.htm>, or from Wildlife Services' web site at [http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife\\_damage/nepa.shtml](http://www.aphis.usda.gov/wildlife_damage/nepa.shtml).

Hard copies may be obtained by contacting USDA-APHIS Wildlife Services, 2803 Jolly Rd., Suite 100, Okemos, MI 48864, (517) 336-1928 or FAX (517) 336-1934.

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